2018

Instagram Strategy Guide

Strategies to start making Instagram your favorite and most successful place to market your business.

SueBZimmerman.com

New to Instagram? Using it for a few months? Or maybe you've been using it personally but not yet as a marketing vehicle?

You're in the right place! The goal of this strategy guide is to give you guidelines so that you can start using Instagram effectively to make money or build awareness for your brand.

The Power of Instagram

Instagram is a mobile based social media platform with its core built to allow you to share quality images right from your smartphone to an audience of those who follow you. It quickly surpassed the number of Twitter users late in 2014. In just 7 years Instagram has reached over 800 million monthly active users.

So what does that mean for marketers and business owners? Your target audience is likely on Instagram. In fact 80% of Instagram users are following a business. This means you have free daily access to a very active user base. Crazy, right?! More engagement on Instagram means more eyes on your business and potentially more money in your bank account.

What's NOT true about Instagram.

Here are a few common misconceptions about Instagram. If you have some of the following beliefs I challenge you to keep an open mind as you continue to read this guide.

Instagram is not just for teenagers.
Instagram is not a place to only share motivational quotes.
Instagram is not a place to post link after link to blog posts and articles.
Instagram is not going to increase your sales overnight.
Instagram is not easy!

Unlike other platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or Pinterest, you can't simply post a link to an article leading to your website or a link to shop and buy your products. There's more to it than that.

▸ So then why is Instagram so popular for brands?

There are a few reasons Instagram has become such a popular platform so quickly.

SIMPLE First, it's really simple! There is less noise on Instagram because it was built to do one thing only - share beautiful images. There's no crazy sidebar with ads. There are no distracting pop ups. And most importantly most accounts only have access to sharing a link in one place. In fact, the ads that do now run on Instagram are placed right into the newsfeed so it feels really normal to see them instead of being annoying. Users are not being taken on a wild goose chase from site to site all over the Internet. They stay on Instagram. In fact the average user spends 21 minutes on Instagram EVERY DAY. Imagine your content, services, or products in front of your ideal customers every day? Yep, it's pretty powerful.

VISUAL Secondly, people love visual content. Instagram is like a digital scrapbook keeping your photos compiled together chronologically forever. In the fast-paced world we now live in people spend less time reading to figure things out and more time looking and watching. Accounts that do well on Instagram are creative, eye-catching, and visually pleasing. Imagine flipping through a magazine that only had content from people and brands you totally love. It's simple...we are a society that likes images; and Instagram allows you to scroll through hundreds of images with a quick swipe of your thumb.

MOBILE Lastly, Instagram is made for mobile. Instagram started as a mobile application and didn't even have a web based platform until several months after it became popular. Users have Instagram right at their finger-tips 24/7. Most people keep their phone within arms-reach at all times including when they sleep and use the bathroom. In 2017 more people shopped from their mobile device than their desktops. The natively mobile friendly interface makes the Instagram user experience engaging and addicting.

▸ So is it possible to really make money using Instagram? Absolutely.

Whether you have a product or service based business, a strong Instagram strategy allows you to gain brand awareness and increase your visibility online. When you're able to connect to your audience in the ways that they already enjoy consuming content, you're much closer to converting real customers.

▸ So what if you've never used Instagram before? That's okay! Start here.

Instagram works for both iOS and Android users. Visit your app store to download it to your mobile device.

If you're new to Instagram follow the next 7 guidelines to get started with a business-minded strategy.

☐ Choose a great username.

Your username should be one that is easily searchable and recognizable. If you're marketing a personal brand, use your name. If you're a larger company, use your branded company name. Try to match your Twitter handle if you already have one. There's a chance your name might already be taken. In that case you need to get a little creative. You may want to add a middle initial, use an underscore or period, or add a word like tv or your city to the end. Never use numbers; they make it difficult to find you.

BRAINSTORM HERE

PRO TIP

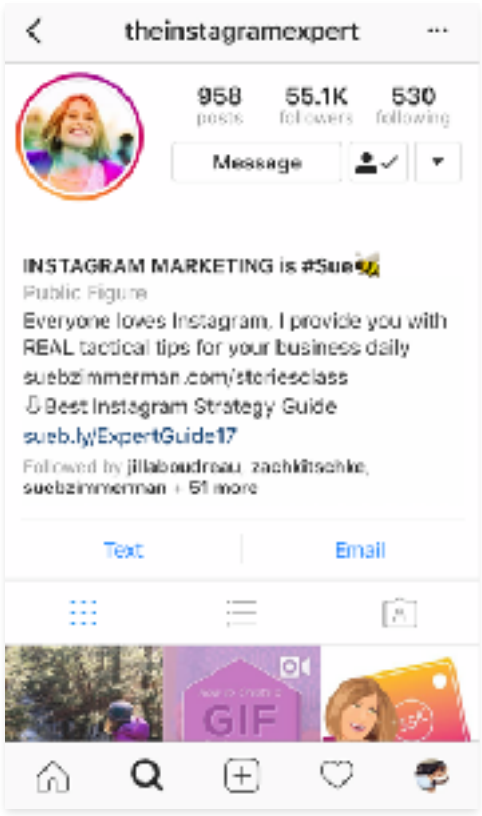
- If suebzimmerman was taken I would use suebzimmerman_ or sueb.zimmerman
- To search usernames go to the explore button (magnifying glass at the bottom of your screen). You can type in your ideal username and see what has been taken.
- To change your username: Click profile (last icon on the bottom right) and then edit profile. Do all of this set up before adding any friends or clients.

☐ Design a clear and informative bio.

Along with an eye-catching avatar (that tiny circular picture representing who you are), your profile should tell people what your business is all about. Use industry keywords that help strangers easily figure out what it is that you offer. That way they can easily and quickly decide if your account is one they might like to follow. A strong bio also includes a call to action whether it be “leave a comment”, “use our hashtag”, “email for inquiry”, “visit our website” or any other request you have for your followers. And most importantly you need to have a link to wherever it is that you’d like to drive traffic. This could be your website, blog, YouTube channel, Etsy shop, or any other site. I encourage people to lead followers somewhere that will add them to your email list. For example, this strategy guide is what I have in my bio most of the time. Once you have an Instagram follower on your email list you’ll then be able to nurture and communicate with them regularly.

BRAINSTORM HERE

PRO TIP



☐ Produce great visuals.

Once your account is set up as a great representation of your business, your content also needs to reflect that.

- Write down 3-5 words that describe your business; think about how others might describe it.
- Then choose to only post images that align with those descriptions. You'll want to share a variety of content. Some ideas include happy customers or employees to show off company culture, inspirational quotes or action shots, your products out in the world, or pictures from events.
- In each post you need to make sure you're providing value for your followers. Think to yourself, "does this give them a reason to come back to my page?" As spontaneous as Instagram should be, it's extremely helpful to compile a stock of images that are ready to post at any time. You don't need to overcomplicate things.
- Use your smartphone, avoid blurry pictures and bad lighting, and have fun with the built-in Instagram filters.
- I also highly recommend sticking to a consistent visual theme. Whether you use the in-app features to edit your pics or a third-party app, maintaining a theme helps you appear more professional, solidifies branding, and often leads to faster follower growth.
- I recommend posting 9 images before making your account public.

BRAINSTORM HERE

PRO TIP

- Use the tool Planoly to upload your photos ahead of time to see what your content will look like all together.
- Adjust your posting plan or editing style to create a cohesive look.

☐ Put thought into your descriptions and tagging.

Once you're ready to start sharing images or videos you'll want to consider what you're going to write.The description of your post is just as important as the image itself. Always provide additional value, insights, or inspiration as context around your post. Tag people or other brands that are in the picture. This gives others credit while providing supporting information to your followers. Before you share a post think to yourself, "is this meaningful, entertaining, interesting, funny, informative, resourceful, or motivational?", If the answer is no think again before your share it. Instead of just stating what the picture is about, consider what supporting stories you could tell that would add context for your followers who likely don't know much about your brand yet.

BRAINSTORM HERE

PRO TIP

Only tag people or companies if they are in the picture you are taking (you never want to come across as spammy, especially as you are setting up your account).

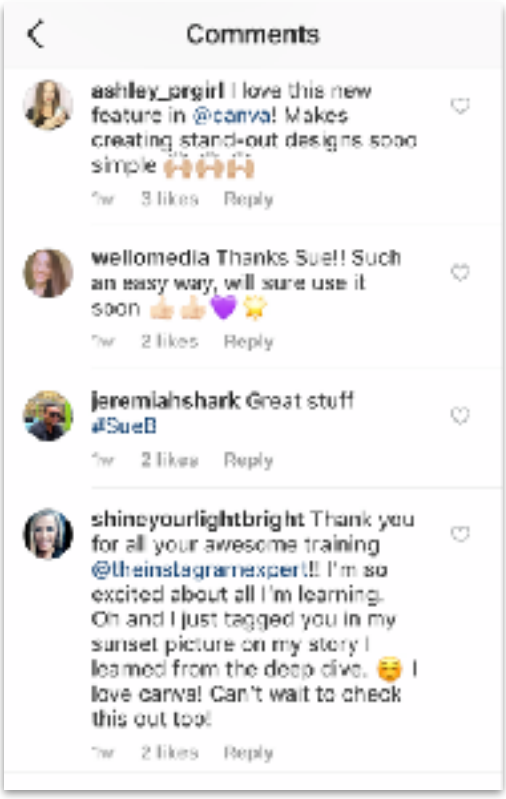
☐ Increase your engagement….by engaging.

Start by following a minimum of 200 people. This will force you to find people you already know as well as potential customers. Use the explore button (the magnifying glass) to discover new people you might like to follow. Naturally many of the people you follow will follow you back in return if your content is appealing. Regularly like their posts and leave genuine comments. The more you interact with others the more they will interact with you. When you're first starting out spend 20 minutes a day simply engaging with others.

BRAINSTORM HERE

PRO TIP

The simplest way to show appreciation is to like a comment by tapping the tiny hearts to the right.


Comments
ashley_pegirl I love this new feature in @canva! Makes creating stand-out designs sooo simple
wellomedia Thanks Sue!! Such an easy way, will sure use it soon
jeremiahshark Great stuff #SueB
shineyourlightbright Thank you for all your awesome training @theinstagramexpert!! I'm so excited about all I'm learning. On and I just tagged you in my sunset picture on my story I learned from the deep dive. I love canva! Can't wait to check this out too!

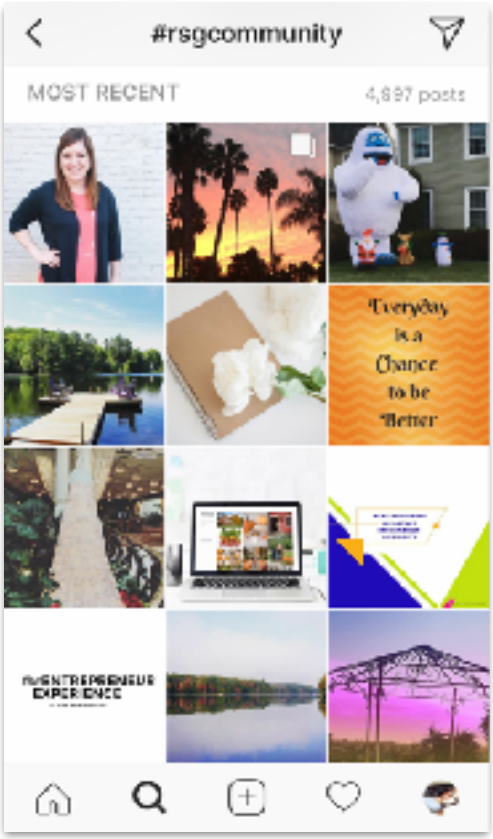
☐ Use specific hashtags.

The magic is in the hashtags. It will take a little while to figure out which ones work best for attracting your ideal followers but you won't know until you start playing around with them. Use a variety of very specific hashtags while avoiding wildly popular ones. The goal is to use hashtags that your potential customers are already browsing. Look at some of the hashtags your competitors are using as well as ones your followers are using. You can use up to 30 hashtags on each post.
You'll also want to choose at least one hashtag that is unique to your business. Start tagging your own pictures with it and promote it in your bio. This creates what I like to call a "hashtag hub." As your account grows your followers might share your content to their own accounts and use your unique hashtag.

BRAINSTORM HERE

PRO TIP

To gain maximum exposure, add your hashtags below your description so that your content is immediately curated within each hashtag hub.



☐ Cross-promote on other platforms.

If you're already using other social media platforms you should promote your new Instagram account to your existing audience. You may even share some of your Instagram posts to give your followers a taste of what they can expect from your new account. But be careful not to overshare. You don't want to bombard your network with the same images over and over again. Keep people interacting on Instagram by keeping most of your content exclusive. However, if there's something highly relevant to your entire audience you can share directly to Facebook, Twitter, or Tumblr right inside Instagram.

BRAINSTORM HERE

PRO TIP

It's also helpful to announce your new account in a newsletter to your existing email list if you already have one. Those who enjoy your emails might also enjoy your Instagram account.

▸ So what was not addressed in this Strategy Guide?

There's so much more to Instagram marketing than I could cover in this guide. As Instagram continues to add features, strategy can become as complex as you want it to be. Here are explanations of features Instagram added that you might be curious about.

Instagram Stories

This feature gives you the opportunity to create a series of short videos and photos inside Instagram separate from your account feed that are only available to be viewed by your followers for 24 hours. Familiar with Snapchat? Instagram Stories works very similarly.

The biggest benefit to using Instagram stories is the ability to give your followers a more intimate look at your business and the things you care about without spending hours planning and creating videos.

Instagram Live

Instagram Live allows you to connect with your audience through a live broadcast with the tap of a button. Again, this feature gives you the opportunity to connect directly with your audience to build transparency, answer questions, and highlight parts of your brand in a very real and raw medium.

The nuances of both Instagram Stories and Instagram Live are always changing. For tutorial based education around both features look out for my limited edition social media classes featured on the Programs page of my website, suebzimmerman.com; I announce these classes via email about a week before I teach live.

For more free Instagram tips, tutorials, and tools **visit my YouTube playlist here.**

ABOUT **SUE B.**

I'm Sue B. Zimmerman, aka #TheInstagramExpert. I have built my career empowering entrepreneurs and marketing professionals to leverage the power of Instagram to produce tangible business results. As a highly sought after business coach, I've traveled the world speaking, inspiring, and sharing my knowledge and extensive experience about social media marketing. With over 30 years of business experience, including SueB.Do, Boxer Rebellion, and Sue B. Zimmerman Enterprise, I know what it takes to build a million dollar business.

SueBZimmerman.com

@theinstagramexpert